

Reuel Nims Store
Humboldt
Richardson County
Nebraska

HABS No. NE-37

HABS
NEB,
74-HUMB,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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Historic American Building Survey
Reuel Nims Store

Location: South terminus of Parkview Street
Humboldt, Nebraska

Date of Construction: 1867 (modified 1890-1900 and 1910-20)

Present Owner: Humboldt Housing Authority
Humboldt, Nebraska

Present use: Store was demolished in 1980 as a result of expansion
of Humboldt's elderly housing project.

Significance: The Reuel Nims store building is significant
historically because of its association with Reuel
Nims, a person important to the early commercial
and political life of Richardson County.

Historian: Julie A. Corona; National Park Service; July, 1986.

The Reuel Nims Store was built in 1867 for Reuel Nims, a 28-year old native of Erie County, Pennsylvania. It housed the mercantile establishment of Ruel Nims and Company (sic), founded in that year by Nims and his brother William. Theirs was the first store in the vicinity of the town of Humboldt and shortly preceded the founding of the town. A second Nims store, built in 1869 on the town square replaced it entirely by 1870. Additions and alterations were made to the building, apparently in two stages, and it was converted to a residence, probably by the second stage.

In addition to his mercantile business, by 1872, Nims built an elevator in Humboldt and established a banking company in Falls City. In June of 1882, Ruel Nims & Co. became the First National Bank of Falls City with Reuel Nims as cashier. Nims played a less important role politically in Richardson County where he served as County Clerk from 1875-77 and was elected a member of the House for the 8th Session of the Nebraska Legislature in October of 1870, serving the year 1871.

The store is located three blocks south of the town square at the south terminus of Parkview Street on Long Branch Creek, formerly a tributary of the North Fork of Big Nemaha River and now a municipal park pond (see HABS photo No. NE-37-1). As of the time of documentation, there are remains of two non-original outbuildings on the site. A third outbuilding, a small, south-opening wood frame shed, is known to have existed due east of the main building. A stone well and cistern are located west of the original main building, below the existing patio and west wall respectively (see HABS photo No. NE-37-2). Stone walls, stone, brick and tile retaining walls and remnants of brick, tile and concrete foundations tie the complex of outbuildings together (see HABS photo No. NE-37-3).

The original store consisted of a three-story limestone building, square in plan, together with a south-facing limestone enclosed courtyard extending south and southwest of the essentially underground lower story. The banked character of the structure allowed entrance to the basement storage area from the lower south side and to the main living area from the upper north side. Although most early buildings in the area are wood frame, limestone construction is typical of substantial buildings of the period. All openings in masonry appear to be original and unaltered, except: one ground floor alcove has been filled; a transom light above the north door has been covered by stucco and plaster; and the small opening in the south wall of the courtyard appears to be non-original. The windows are the only noteworthy interior details. Interior trim was limited to unadorned 1 by 6 baseboards, 1 by 4 door trim, and 1 by 12 window stools.

Two of the three square rooms have been partitioned. The top floor and lower story have been divided (probably originally) into two chambers with a narrow partition. Walls of the first floor and walls and ceilings of the second floor were originally plastered, with 2 by 4 furring of the second floor north and south walls to provide a better joint with the plastered rafters. Several 2 by 8 planks are laid in the gables, fastened to the ends of rafter bearing

plates to resist roof spreading. A single flue in the east wall is breached at each story (see HABS photo No. NE-37-9). An existing, apparently original stone stair connects the two lower levels; and altered framing, patched flooring, and diagonally cut joist ends are evidence of another original stair between those two levels. Altered framing and patched flooring indicate a former interior stair between the two upper levels. Second floor joists were originally extended across the stair location and into pockets in the south wall, then cut at 6 inches and 36 inches from that wall to form the opening; but that entire procedure was probably part of initial construction. The sequence described would have facilitated the aforementioned finishing of the second floor south wall. Moreover, the pattern of interior circulation between upper and exterior circulation between lower levels is typical among square, three-story masonry buildings of the Nebraska frontier. The apparently original exterior door at the second floor suggests an exterior access to that level, but no evidence of a stair was found in the exterior stone face of the west wall; that door, as well as the one below it, was probably constructed in anticipation of a future expansion rather than to provide additional exterior access.

The north and west walls of the courtyard are full story height. The south wall drops to four feet high at a point aligned with the centerline of the stone stair; a coping over the lower portion is keyed well into the upper portion, which is neatly terminated. Two feet east of that point the wall and coping are roughly cut, without joint tooling, decreasing the height to 18 inches. The east wall of the courtyard drops from 8 feet to eighteen inches at the edge of the gallery. Except for portions of the 18-inch high segment, all courtyard walls and the stone stair are similar in materials and workmanship to the foundation of the building proper and are bonded to it and to each other.

The first stage of alterations consisted of extending the gallery south and west over the entire courtyard, maintaining its approximate roof shape but enclosing it with wood frame walls. The second stage included addition of the northwest quadrant, alteration of the roof to create a gable in the north wall, covering of the entire north portion with stucco, and construction of the porches. A substage of apparently interrelated activities, including construction of rustic wood shelving supported by vertical portions of tree limbs in Room 02 (see HABS photo No. NE-37-11) and of both clay tile vaults and the aforementioned alterations of masonry openings, are associated with the second stage by the use of hollow clay tile, loosely jointed limestone, and Portland cement. Stylistic and technologic manifestations indicate probable dates of 1890-1900 for the first, and 1910-20 for the second addition. Few interior features are notable with the exception of the glass paneled French doors between stone and frame addition to the loft and the hand painted loft floors. These floors exhibit non-sophisticated hand painted motifs on linoleum in the stone portion and directly on wood in the frame addition (see HABS photo No. NE-37-13). The store was demolished in 1980 for the Humboldt Housing Authority, as part of an expansion of the town's elderly public housing project.